

MILITARY AND NON MILITARY THREATS TO THE GULF COOPERATION COUNTRIES

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MILITARY AND NON MILITARY THREATS TO THE GULF COOPERATION COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

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The international strategic importance of Gulf oil resources, the intense political and economic attention to the Gulf Countries' affairs by nations beyond the region, necessitate looking at the impact on Gulf security of geopolitics beyond the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) . From a geopolitical standpoint, satisfying Western Nations' interests are crucial to maintaining Gulf security because the United States and Europe's provision of military capabilities and management of a military coalition against Iraq. With non-Gulf Arab participation, this coalition was decisive in creating collective actions both diplomatic and military that won victory in Iraq.

The driving force behind the US' decision to commit resources to the region is the vital importance of the free flow of oil resources to the world, especially through the straits of Hormuz. Member states of the European Union share concerns over the free flow of oil but cannot match the military weight of the United States in the Gulf. Thus, the Europeans have played a supportive, as opposed to a primary offensive military role as witnessed in the Europeans' contribution to the coalition that liberated Kuwait,

The Gulf countries are thriving economically, benefiting from the rise in the oil prices. The boom is not without consequences. A massive influx of unskilled labors,

especially Asians, seeking a better living, is posing great dangers in unprecedented ways. These are dangers to the security, demography, culture, and education.

MILITARY AND NON MILITARY THREATS TO THE GULF COOPERATION COUNTRIES

The security and stability in the Gulf, is not only a regional issue but it is global issue considering the strategic importance of the Gulf region. The responsibility for the security of the Arabian Gulf region lies first on its own people, especially the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and these are, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates. (Fig1)



Figure 1. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries

The GCC and the surrounding Gulf region are important geographically and economically. The Islamic Republic of Iran lies to the east of the GCC, to the west lies the Sultanate of Oman, to the south-west the United Arab Emirates, and the most critical sea line of communication-- the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait is 20 nautical miles wide at the entrance which is considered the most strategic Strait world because of the amount of energy resources that pass through the Strait. 50% of oil tankers in the world pass through the Strait of Hormuz. The power that controls this Strait possesses the

economic control of the world. Oil is the main export of region, where oil from the GCC is about 40% of the total world production, compromises 60% of proven reserves.

The location of the region is a highly important strategic line of debarkation. The GCC lies between East and West making the area a critical transshipment point for both commercially and militarily vessels. This transshipment point is a conjunction of lines of communication between Asia, Africa and Europe (Fig2).

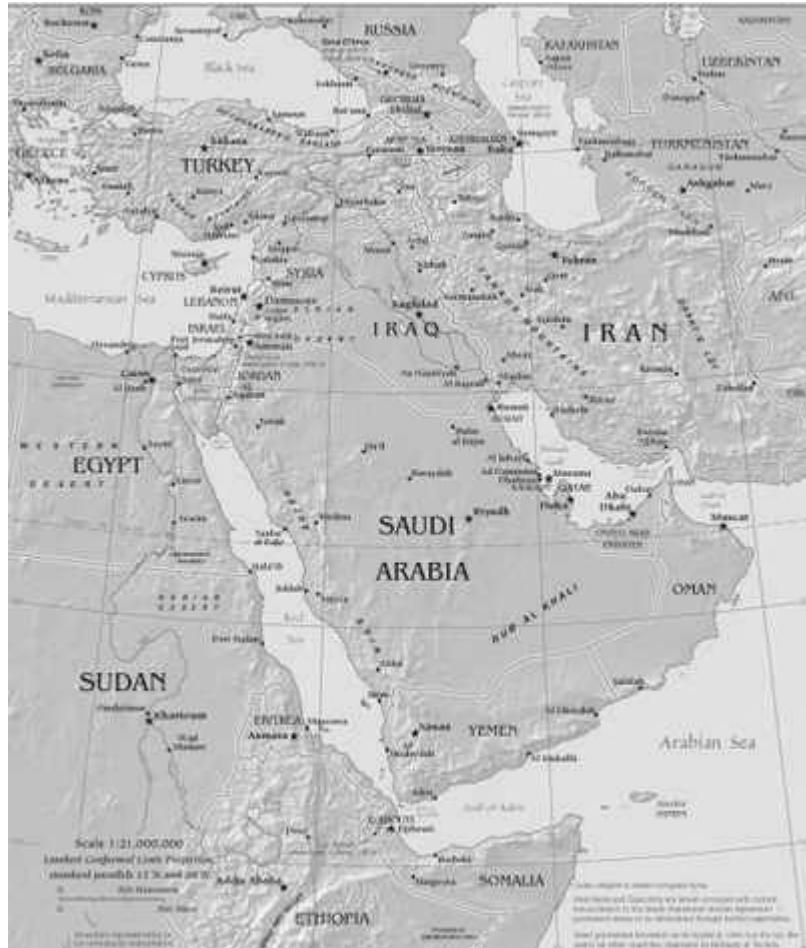


Figure 2. Location of the Gulf amidst Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Despite the GCC richness in oil and thriving economic conditions the military dimension is the most relatively weak and vulnerable. Against large military threats like Iran, the GCC is unable to provide for its own security and the defense. There are eight

countries on the Gulf, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the Republic of Iraq, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. These countries vary in the length of coastline on the Gulf and size of the land mass and population. Iran has the longest coastline on the Gulf 635 miles contrasting with Iraq's shoreline not exceeding 10 miles. The smallest country in the Gulf is Bahrain and the largest is Iran.

Iran has a sense of superiority to its neighbors and takes on a parental role in the region:

- Largest in population
- Most diverse geographic features
- Largest size and length of coasts, produced geopolitical sense weakness in some Gulf countries, and

Military Threats to the Gulf Countries

Threats to the Gulf are mostly regional threats. The political ambitions and the trends by Iraq and Iran to expand their influence has threatened and caused instability in the GCC countries for more than two decades. Nevertheless, despite the large capabilities of those two countries, their capabilities have been reduced because of the Gulf wars.

Iraq presented the primary regional threat. But the US led wars caused the destruction of Iraq's economic and military capabilities. Consequently, Iraq can no longer cause a threat in the region. This is going to lead to new relations between the new Iraq and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries¹

Iran poses the greatest external military threat to the six Arab States of the GCC. Iran, filled with hegemonic ambitions, stimulates regional instability and continues

operations to interfere in Iraq's efforts to form a stable and viable government. A high priority in Teheran during this century no matter what regime is in power or what its relative military capabilities might be is expanding Iran's influence in the Gulf.

Iranian hegemonic activities threatening regional stability:

The Iranian open regional ambitions in claiming that Bahrain is part of Iran and Iranian occupation of three United Arab Emirates islands (Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tumb in 1971)²

Iranian constant demand to participate in any security arrangements in the Gulf region, and claiming that the security issues in the Gulf are regional, in order to make the maintenance of the security limited to the Gulf countries only, thus enabling Iran to control the GCC countries on all areas economics.

The Iranian government is using the growing economy resulting from the rise in oil prices to source its military might.

Implementation of policies that offset the losses suffered during the war with Iraq, and thus regained its military strength.

Seeking acquisition of nuclear weapons making Iran a global hegemonic force. .

Iran has representative liaisons within almost all Arab countries, enjoying legitimacy and local popularity. The most prominent example is «Hezbollah» in Lebanon, which gain Arab sympathy and support in the last war with Israel.

Iranian penetration enjoys ideological cover that makes it acceptable to the target Arabs. This cover takes the shape in the Iranian speech of (Islamic awakening). On the name of the unity of Islam, many Arabs ignore the fact that Iran is illegally occupying

Arab lands. Iran under the mantle of Islam is penetrating and spreading ideologies and resources supporting regional destabilization throughout the region.

Iranian media machine in the Arab world plays a vital role in Iranian penetrating of the Arab world. Iran has an Arabic Speaking channel, ALALAM , which does not need a satellite receiver to watch in some areas of Iraq and the Gulf. Iran has allied channels, such as the Lebanese MANAR 1, and MANAR 2. Iran has daily newspapers, distributed in Arab and European cities, a further evidence of the omnipresent influence of the Iranians amid Arab media world.

The Iranian assurances to the GCC countries that Iran will not attack regional countries in response to an American strike on the nuclear reactors should not be believed by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Even if the Iranians ratified their promises not to subject the Arab oil installations to any Iranian military action directly, the risks of collateral damage from the potential direct confrontation between Americans and Iranians over the Tehran nuclear file is a great possibility.

What we are witnessing from the interaction of the crisis over the Iranian nuclear file may rapidly evolve to military actions. The scenario is anticipated in the Arabian Gulf region. The scenario threat analysis outlines the fragility of the security situation and the negative ramifications to regional stability. The GCC portends that any confrontation between the United States and Iran will not be confined to the theater of operations, as was the case in previous Gulf wars. As seen by Anoush Ehteshami, Professor of International Relations and Head of the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University :

My sense is that since autumn 2005 a new situation in terms of relations between Iran and its Arab neighbors can be discerned. With Iraq Tehran

has now entered a unique and perhaps enviable partnership and with every passing day its role there is being strengthened. Once the Coalition forces leave, of course, Iraq will be even more dependent on Iran for political, socio-economic and ultimately security support. When the military connection is added as a formal basket of bilateral relations, then we will be marking a dramatic shift in the balance of power in this vital sub-region. Were Iran able to continue with its nuclear program unhindered, then it will have acquired a major lead over all its neighbors in both geopolitical and geo-strategic terms. The consequences of such a major shift of power are great for all the parties concerned, particularly for those countries that view the Persian Gulf as the main source of their energy and an important market³

In the U.S. the strategic political and security policy circles are debating the role of US military forces overseas, especially in the Gulf region. There is a remarkably large coalition of American-Arabs and American-Jews who support an aggressive and immediate US military response in the Gulf, to any ambiguous or unambiguous act of war by Iran, including developments of nuclear weapons, threat to Arabs neighbors, or to Israel, or any attempt to interfere in the freedom of navigation in the Gulf, or disturb the flow of oil from the Gulf.

Michael Kraig is a program officer in Policy Analysis and Dialogue at the Stanley Foundation. Kraig notes that the increasing demand for oil by voracious appetites of China and India will make the GCC region a precious child that must be protected from the hungry wolf, Iran. Kraig writes,

Despite its political instabilities, the Persian Gulf continues to be the home of the most easily exploited and cost-effective petroleum reserves in the world – natural resources that are under girding the phenomenal economic rise of India and China and the world's continuous prosperity⁴

In the Arab-Israeli conflict, US policy makers have consistently elevated Israeli security interests above other major US interests in the region shutting their eyes and ears to injustices committed by Israel such as the brutal Israeli invasion of Lebanon in

1982. This flawed policy has often produced a predictable backlash within the Arab World.

The United States has experienced difficulty underwriting Israel's security program and securing its interest in maintaining access to Middle East, particularly GCC, oil supplies. This was particularly evident during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and accompanying Arab oil embargo. An Arab-Israeli peace offers the greatest prospect for balancing these two incompatible goals and the United States has long striven to promote that peace.

An Arab-Israeli settlement will have significant consequence for the future of GCC stability. Until a fair and permanent Arab-Israeli settlement is obtained and accepted by all there is little possibility of achieving an effective strategic cooperation against a commonly perceived threat, e.g. Iran. Gulf Cooperation Council-Plus-Two Ministerial Joint Statement hosted by State Department in Washington in 2007 reported:

The participants agreed that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains a central and core problem and that without resolving this conflict the region will not enjoy sustained peace and stability. The participants affirmed their commitment to achieving peace in the Middle East through a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and noted that the foundation for such an outcome includes the Arab Peace Initiative, UN Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515, and the Road Map⁵

Domestic conditions in the GCC States could make a continued US military presence increasingly difficult. US military personnel stationed or deployed in some of the Gulf countries, could provoke tensions through insensitivity to local customs. This cultural rift could spark increasing internal instability and unrest resulting in GCC demanding the exit of US military personnel, because the GCC population views these forces as occupying forces-- occupying a holy Muslim lands. Joseph McMillan is a senior research fellow at the National Defense University's Institute for National

Strategic Studies, focusing on issues related to terrorism, the greater Middle East, and South Asia elaborates on this threat to long term US interests.

The U.S. military presence itself becomes the hot button issue of national political debate — particularly if such questions as host nation support costs or concessional status of forces terms become issues of public debate. This is not unique to the Gulf — witnesses the political hay that Okinawa politicians have been able to make from the criminal conduct of U.S. military personnel on the island. The heat generated over these issues drives out discussion and addresses the more fundamental issues facing the polity.⁶

A regional trend that extends far beyond the Gulf to the entire Muslim World is the rapid growth of the religion of Islam. Unlike the US where church and state are separated, in Islam church and state can never be separated. Islam has become the language of political dialogue. A serious threat could easily materialize in this twenty-first century if extremism becomes the method of choice for political change. Violence breeds violence, and once it's ignited, it would be extremely difficult to contain. The challenge for the Gulf States is to work with their domestic critics in creating feasible changes, or face the alternative consequences of revolutionary change. Joseph McMillan continues,

As reflected in a number of Osama bin Laden's pronouncements, as well as in the 1992 "Memorandum of Advice" to King Fahd from a group of conservative Saudi clerics, the presence of U.S. forces in a country can de-legitimize its government by calling into question the regime's ability to provide for the common defense. How U.S. military presence affects the popular legitimacy of the government will be a growing issue in Iraq as well — constantly calibrating the needs of security against those of legitimacy will be a crucial task for the Administration for as long as U.S. forces remain in Iraq.⁷

On the Gulf-Europe relation, we can say that European's interests in the Gulf lie within the, energy, trade and investment dimensions. The principal concern of Europe is the security of energy supplies. Europeans economies and the standard of living of its

peoples would be at risk, if the continuous flow of oil and gas at reasonable prices, disrupted, or ceased for any reason, another European concern is a continues access to markets in the Gulf oil-producing countries, and the security of European investments in the Gulf. Dr. Robert Skinner, Director, Oxford Institute for Energy Studies stated,

Energy security cannot be guaranteed. But it can be reinforced by ensuring that the political and economics context between the EU and the GCC is as free of misunderstandings as possible⁸

The Russian-Gulf relation, was expressed on the Seventh Joint Session of the Russian-Arab Business Council held in Bahrain on May 21, 2007, which established that economic cooperation between the Arab countries and Russia is the most important element in bilateral relations package as a whole. This bilateral relations package is important due to the accelerating globalization tendencies, international competition, cutting-edge information and communication technologies, and the fast opening of markets within a free-trade zone. The huge Arabs financial capabilities, if coupled with the Russian advanced technologies, can on one hand, help modernize the giant Russian industrial, technological, and engineering institutions and firms. While on the other hand, the Arabs states should keep doors open for Russian investments that would impact positively on the Arab technological development and back-up of scientific research.

Non Military Threats

With the marked increase in oil prices in the era of the seventies of the last century, and the small populations, the Gulf countries imported thousands foreign labor from Arab and Asian countries, with the aim of building the infrastructure necessary for the development plans

Foreign labor, particularly the Asian, is one of the biggest and most dangerous work forces to the Arabian Gulf region in the modern era. The dominance of foreigners has even been more pronounced in the workforce than in the total population. Non-nationals constituted a majority of the labor force in all the GCC countries, with the average being more than 70 percent. The mass volume of foreign labors is the largest compared to any other foreigners in the region. Since the foreign laborers make the vast majority of the labor force, and constitutes a large proportion of society, it is feared that the continuity of relying on it will have a serious consequences and it is going to create social problems on the long run.

This development has posed security, cultural, political, economic, and social threats to the governments and population,

Security Dimension

There are large numbers of foreign workers entering the region, certain elements of the expatriate labor force that could potentially be quasi militant function as “intelligence instruments, to instigate disputes and sabotage,” or serve as tools “for political pressure, and monetary. For example In April 2005 a thousand workers from Bangladesh, attacked their embassy in Kuwait protesting against the failure of the embassy, in taking actions against a Kuwaiti company that did not pay the wages of these workers.

This attack has caused substantial material damage to the embassy. Although the incident ended peacefully it indicates a great risk if the circumstances were different. Another great risks and unforeseen threats to the GCC are smuggling prohibited items into the country such as drugs, explosives or any of which will affect the stability and

security of the community. These guest workers cover for each other thwarting justice in crime investigating, such as run a way cases....etc.

Cultural Dimension

The foreign laborers, especially the Asian, have a direct negative effect on the culture of the Gulf communities through their numerical superiority. This cultural side includes the presence of foreign schools in the GCC states. These schools are the most serious institutions that have worked, and are still working, to deviate the new Muslims generations. Although they were established at the outset to teach children of foreign communities, reality says that the danger has been extended to the people of the Gulf. This deviation began spreading in the societies of the Gulf entity and is affecting its Arabic identity. The high ratio of Arabs and Muslims children studying in these schools, compared to Asian students, makes it obvious as to how much influence these schools have on Arabic identity. Because they believe that these schools offer far better education than the public and Arabic schools.

The vernacular Arabic language used, in the Gulf countries with widespread of labor influx from the Indian subcontinent, has been largely affected. For example, in banking and other business, often a mix of Indian and Urdu languages can be heard in lieu of Arabic. The defacement of the language, and the introduction of new words, is a guaranteed combination for the corruption of the Arabic language in the region, as a sign of cultural distortion.

Political Dimension

There are other negative consequences accompanying the inflows of this employment to the Arab Gulf states. These laborers caused some political

embarrassments to some of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, by the pressure from the Governments of those laborers on the GCC governments to employ larger numbers of their nationals, which will result in increasing the volume of future laborers, especially those working in domestic service. Those governments are also interfering in the internal and domestic affairs of the host nations, by demanding certain working conditions, housing standards, and wages rates.

Other factors have contributed to the intervention in the internal affairs of the Arabian Gulf countries, including pressure from some foreign countries claiming the protection of interests of their nationals, to find justification for the continued flow of funds to improve their balance of payments and to mitigate the extent of their unemployment.

Economics Dimension

The foreign labor force is a substantial drain of the GCC states' hard currency earnings, with remittances to migrants' home countries amounting to \$27 billion each year; \$16 billion coming from the migrant workers in Saudi Arabia alone. These remittances constitute a large portion of the GCC countries' Gross Domestic Product. It has been shown that the percentage of the GDP that foreign labor generates is roughly equal to what the state has to spend on them⁹.

The table below shows the population of the GCC states in 2004 and latest 2005-6 estimates¹⁰

<u>Country</u>	<u>Nationals 2004</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Expatriates</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Total 2004</u>	<u>Current Total</u>
<u>Bahrain</u>	<u>438.209</u>	<u>62.0</u>	<u>268.951</u>	<u>38.0</u>	<u>707.160</u>	<u>707.160</u>
<u>Kuwait</u>	<u>943.000</u>	<u>35.6</u>	<u>1.707.000</u>	<u>64.4</u>	<u>2.650.000</u>	<u>2.992.000</u>
<u>Oman</u>	<u>2.325.812</u>	<u>80.1</u>	<u>577.293</u>	<u>19.9</u>	<u>2.903.105</u>	<u>3.102.000</u>
<u>Qatar</u>	<u>223.209</u>	<u>30.0</u>	<u>520.820</u>	<u>70.0</u>	<u>744.029</u>	<u>855.000</u>
<u>Saudi Arabia</u>	<u>16.529.302</u>	<u>72.9</u>	<u>6.144.236</u>	<u>27.1</u>	<u>22.673.583</u>	<u>27.020.000</u>
<u>UAE</u>	<u>722.000</u>	<u>19.0</u>	<u>3.278.000</u>	<u>81.0</u>	<u>4.000.000</u>	<u>4.700.000</u>
<u>GCC</u>	<u>21.184.323</u>	<u>62.9</u>	<u>12.486.349</u>	<u>37.1</u>	<u>33.677.832</u>	<u>39.376.160</u>

Table 1.

Conclusion

Nuclear Iran poses a serious threat, regionally and globally. Nuclear Iran is going to pursue a more hegemonic aggressive policy against its neighbors. The implementation of this policy will be through more conflicts, more demands of its neighbors, and through the use of terrorism, including the use of Hezbollah, against Israel, and particularly, against the oil states in the GCC.

Nuclear Iran will be the backbone of the radical camps in the Middle East, and the Islamic world, it is going to coerce the moderate governments in the region to proceed according to its policy, and that include the relationship with Israel and the United States.

Nuclear Iran will force others to enter a nuclear arms race, and the possible candidates are Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, in addition to Iraq in the long run.

The geographical location of the Gulf Cooperation Council gave it the excellent strategic importance, which will remain for decades to come the center of global attention, and the focus of regional conflicts.

The GCC States should not leave the issue of security in the hands of Washington's policy makers. Everyone should listen to the voice of reason coming from the Arab Gulf region and not deal with the crisis as if it only concerns them directly. No assurances from the Iranian side, nor any guarantees from the American side, can substitute for collective diplomatic action from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

The GCC countries must direct the parties of the crisis to defuse the crisis. The GCC countries must convince everyone that the problem will not be confined inside the confrontation theater of operations. Because the dangers of direct confrontation between Iran and the US, will not just affect the GCC countries, it will affect the world security and peace.

The GCC countries must build a capable unified military force for the defense of the Arab Gulf countries, to deter any challenge or threat that the GCC countries might face, without capable military defense force, the Gulf region will remain dependence on foreign forces in providing security and protection,

Security of the Gulf is the responsibility of its own people but some alliances are needed to protect such a vital region in the world¹¹.

Currently, Gulf security is essentially defined by the US. The US is providing the military presence to counter-balance the strength of Iran, in defense of the GCC States.

Let our position be clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests

of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force. The Carter Doctrine¹²

While the Europeans may be helping to prevent the total alienation of Iran, in company with various members of the GCC, keeping the lines open for future accommodations to emerge.

The GCC states cannot demand immediate, effective military support from Russia if regional intentions increase or if a clear need arises for decisive action, because of the mutual interests, the nuclear cooperation between Iran and Russia. The Russians will give higher priority to their national interests in Iran than to its new relations with the GCC States.

The dangerous and negative effects of the foreign labors are spreading like wildfire, and it's affecting the education, the values, the culture and customs, and almost every aspect of life. We must be aware of the seriousness of this phenomenal, and the GCC governments and citizens, must work together to counter it and reduce it.

The number of foreign labors in the GCC countries exceeded 12 Millions (the schedule above). The remittances to migrants' home countries amounting to \$27 billion each year¹³, therefore a huge responsibilities are laying on the shoulders of the GCC governments, the societies, the media and the education establishments , a great measures must be taken to resolve these issues,

The Governments

Nationalization of labor force through giving jobs priorities to nationals, compulsion the private sector on contributing in training and employing nationals within certain percentage of the total employees is a priority. Creating jobs opportunities for the

nationals and expanding the use of advanced technology in the industry and business sectors, replacing the reliance on human labor is the way of the future.

“Arabization” of the foreign workers is a good idea as it would remove the fears arising from none Arab foreign workers, whether on the security, political, social or cultural dimensions, and in the same time it will strengthen the Arab economics integration.

The GCC should implement strict quotas on expatriates, by focusing on bringing the highly skilled foreign labors. Applying stricter regulation on visa issuance. Applying direct and indirect taxes on migrant workers e.g. health fees. Therefore the intake of workers must be within the actual requirements that serve the interest of the country, and must be under the umbrella of the national employments system, and are subjected to strict monitoring and inspections.

The Society

Society can help by withholding expenditures, especially on luxurious and non-essential items or materials, practicing independency in accomplishing jobs, and not relying on foreign workers to do it. Society can aid the governments in the reductions of foreign workers by doing jobs that do not need a highly skilled person to do.

The Media and the Education Establishments

Participation in awareness programs urging people to become self-reliant, and showing the negatives and dangerous effects of the foreign labor on the aspects of security, culture, economy, and above all on the faith and beliefs.

Promote the benefits of being independence societies that has no foreign or external influence upon it, dictating its decisions and affecting its ways of life.

The media should also explain to the citizens their duties in taking up and learning how to do the manual jobs, and explain through articles and educating commentary programs, that they have a major role in stopping the tide of migration foreign labor, when they perform those jobs currently done by foreign labors.

Educate the students and future generations on how to depend on themselves, by teaching them how to do the various jobs, how to utilize new technologies to benefit the country.

Endnotes

¹ The GCC countries are, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates

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¹² Jimmy Carter, “State of the Union Address 1980,” 23 January 1980; available from <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml>; Internet; accessed 26 February 2008.

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